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To: Kevin J. Martin, Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission

Fr: Myria Emma Dawn Carpenter

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Date: October 27, 2005

Re: Comments on Proposed rule to eliminate a telegraphy examination for any amateur radio operator license (WT Docket No. 05-235; FCC 05-143)

Dear Chairman Martin,

In response to the FCC's request for public comment on WT Docket No.05-235; FCC 05-143, (August 31, 2005), I want to communicate my view that Morse Code should be not be eliminate for all amateur radio operator licenses. As a third year law student, I possessed limited knowledge of the Amateur Radio Service until a recent MSN article brought my attention to the relevance and importance of amateur radio especially, in times of emergency. [1] From my research, I believe that eliminating telegraphy examination for all amateur radio licenses is not a good idea.

Introduction and Background

The Commission believes that the elimination of Morse code proficiency as an examination element would have a two-fold benefit to Amateur Radio Services. First, the elimination would encourage individuals who are interested in communications technology, or who are able to contribute to the advancement of the radio art, to become amateur radio

[1] http://msnbc.msn.com/id/9228945/ (last visited Oct. 27, 2005).

operators as well. Second, the Commission feels the telegraphy requirement is unnecessary and may discourage licensees form advancing their skills in the communications and technical phases of amateur radio. The complete elimination of testing for proficiency in Morse code is not in the best interest of the Amateur Radio Service, nor is it consistent with advancing the stated purposes of the Amateur Radio Service.

Comment

Morse code is a standardized method for the transmission of information recognized around the world. Morse code is still relevant and despite what many people think, it has not been surpassed by more modern and electronic encoding schemes. In April 2005, an experienced Morse code operator beat an experienced cell phone SMS text message user by 18 seconds.[2] The text message user even used text slang in a futile attempt to save time. [3] My cell phone has an option to beep SMS in Morse code when it receives an SMS text message. On May 24, 2004, the International Telecommunications Union added the "@" character to Morse code thereby allowing Morse code to send electronic email addresses. [4] Morse code is not outdated and is still useful in the digital age.

One of the stated purposes of the Amateur Radio Service is to "recogni[ze] and enhance[] of the value of amateur radio service to the public... particularly with respect to the providing emergency communications." [5] Often, Morse code is thought of as the "communication of last resort". Morse code provides a simple and effective means of communication in times of emergency when the newer and fragile modern technologies fail. During Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, our country experienced the total failure of high tech communications systems

[2] http://www.timesonline.co.uk/printFriendly/0,,1-2-1571664,00.html (last visited Oct. 27, 2005).
[3] Id.
[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morse_code#External_links (last visited Oct. 27, 2005).
[5] 47 CFR 97.1(a).

including but not limited to cellular and landline phones as well as the internet. These natural weather events demonstrate the vulnerability and lack of reliability of high tech forms of communication during times of emergency and crisis. In such times, knowledge and practice of tried and true modes of communication such as Morse code are priceless and can save lives. Morse code is the most efficient means of communication available during any type of emergency. It is a form of communication, which has served man well for over a century and will continue to serve as a simple and effective means of communication.

Another stated purpose of the Amateur Radio Service is to "encourage[] and improve[] amateur radio service through rules which provide for advancing skills in both the communication and technical phases of the art." [6] Without Morse code as a requirement to advance in radio operator's license, how can you expect to accomplish this goal? By requiring Morse code, operators entering the service are encouraged to spend the time and dedication to further the radio art. The Morse code exam encourages learning and does not present a serious barrier to licensing. Morse is not impossible to learn even for people with disabilities. If it is possible for people with severe motion disabilities or by people with severe sensory disabilities (e.g. deaf and blind) to send and learn Morse code then surely, an able-bodied person can learn Morse code as well. [7]

Learning Morse code is like learning any thing new. It requires discipline and practice. The minimal requirement of a 5 WPM skill is not hard to obtain. The telegraphy examination is the sole remaining practical examination. A multiple-choice test bears little relationship to on-the-air operations and performance. Speaking into a microphone or pressing keys on a keyboard are not operator skills comparable to the ability to send and receive Morse code. Eliminating all

[6] 97 CRF 97.1(b).
[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morse_code#External_links (last visited Oct. 27, 2005).

telegraphy requirements would mean that no amateur radio licensee, regardless of license class, had to demonstrate any operating ability whatsoever.

Morse code transmitters or transceivers are often the first construction projects undertaken by amateur radio operators, and are useful in developing comprehension of how radio frequency circuits work. After gaining experience in the construction and testing of apparatus for the Morse code, many amateurs then graduate to the construction and testing of apparatus for voice or other data modes. Elimination of the international Morse Code examination element will predictably lead to a reduction in the custom of amateurs gaining experience building their own apparatus at an introductory level. The skill of Morse code should be encouraged and promoted not eliminated.

The Commission is incorrect in thinking that the Morse code requirement is not necessary. A third purpose of Amateur Radio Service's purpose is for the "continuation and extension of the amateur's unique ability to enhance international goodwill" requires that telegraphy stay as a requirement.[8] Even though several countries such as Papua New Guinea, Croatia, Denmark, Hong Kong, Austria, Sweden, Iceland, France, New Zealand, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Finland, Singapore, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, UK, and Belgium no longer have a telegraphy requirement, the vast majority of the globe as well as many third world countries still requires and utilizes Morse code. [9] Frequently, these governments or people cannot afford high tech communication systems.

Even if all countries of the world could afford high tech communications, there would still be communication problems. Have you ever talked to someone on the phone with strong accent? Even those whose native tongue is English, such as the British or some of my fellow

[8] 47 CFR 97.1(e).
[9] http://www.nocode.org/articles.html (last visited Oct. 27, 2005).

Tennesseans cannot be fully understood unless I make them spell the words or repeat themselves frequently. Yet this same conversation when translated into Morse code would be understood perfectly. Morse code is probably the best method to send and receive information between two nationalities without a common language and still have an understanding of the information. By its very nature, voice language barriers are nearly non-existent in Morse code. There are no accent problems.

Lastly, the Radio Regulations as revised by WRC-03 do not require that no telegraphy examination requirement should be imposed rather it leaves the decision up to each country's licensing authority to determine. While it is not uncommon for people in foreign lands such as Europe or Asia to speak more than one language, the majority of people in the United States speak only English. By eliminating code, our Amateur radio service will be at a great disadvantage in communicating to other countries. There are still many operators worldwide who still predominately operate in Morse code. Voice communications requires that both operators speak a common language, however utilizing Morse code allows for successfully communication in spite of the language barrier.

Conclusion

The amateur radio licensee statistics referenced in the NPRM indicate that the elimination of the Morse code examination will not have the desire result the Commission is seeking.[10] In April 2000, when the reduction of Morse code requirements to 5 words per minute began, with a principal aim at increasing the number of radio amateurs, there were 678,539 licensed radio amateurs. However, as of September 30, 2005, there were 663,888 licensed radio amateurs.

[10] http://ah0a.org/FCC/Licenses.html (last visited on Oct. 27, 2005).

Therefore, the total number of licensed radio amateurs has decreased since the Commission relaxed the Morse code licensing requirements. Thus, the substantial reduction in Morse code requirements has failed to produce an increase in the number of radio amateur licensees. The complete elimination of an examination in Morse code will not accomplish the Commission's goals in this rulemaking nor will it be inconsistent with the stated purposes of the Amateur Radio Service. I would hate for a terrorist attack to knock out satellite communications and the language of Morse code is long forgotten.